



The United States Department of Justice

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

AUGUST 12, 2019

ATTORNEY GENERAL WILLIAM P. BARR DELIVERS REMARKS AT THE GRAND LODGE FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE'S 64TH NATIONAL BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

New Orleans, LA

Remarks as prepared for delivery

Good morning! Thank you, Chuck [Canterbury], for your kind introduction. Jim [Pasco], it's great to see you and thanks for all that you have done for the FOP over the years.

Congressman Scalise, it is good to see you this morning. Thank you for your support for law enforcement. We will never forget the heroism of the Capitol Police Officers that day and how their swift action prevented a mass tragedy.

Before I begin, I would like to briefly address the news from the Manhattan Correctional Center over the weekend regarding Jeffrey Epstein. This case was very important to the Department. It was important to the dedicated prosecutors and agents who investigated the case and were preparing it for trial. Most importantly, this case was important to the victims who had the courage to come forward and deserved the opportunity to confront the accused in court.

I was appalled – indeed, the entire Department was – and frankly angry, to learn of the MCC's failure to adequately secure this prisoner. We are now learning of serious irregularities at this facility that are deeply concerning and that demand a thorough investigation. The FBI and the Office of Inspector General are already doing just that. We will get to the bottom of what happened at the MCC and we will hold people accountable for this failure.

Let me assure you that this case will continue on against anyone who was complicit with Epstein. Any co-conspirators should not rest easy. The victims deserve justice, and we will ensure they get it.

And now, let me turn to the reason I am here, to renew a relationship with old friends.

It is a real privilege for me to join the Fraternal Order of Police this morning. I enjoyed a close relationship with the FOP my first time around in this job, and I am looking forward to an even closer one this time.

Let me say I am proud to serve in an Administration and under President Trump who so strongly support law enforcement.

To my mind, there is no more noble profession than serving as a police officer. You put your own life and well-being on the line to protect your communities.

Your families spend anxious nights, so we can sleep in peace. You never know what your day may bring — what uncertainty, danger, or threat you might face. But you still get up, put on your uniform and badge, kiss your loved ones, and head out to face whatever risks might come your way.

This calls for a special kind of bravery. I remember that when our troops went off to war in the First Gulf War, they were cheered along the highways as they went. And when they returned in victory, they were cheered and given ticker tape parades — and rightly so.

But when police officers leave their precincts every morning, there are no crowds on the highway cheering you. And when you come home at the end of the day after a job well done, there are no ticker tape parades.

One reason for this is that law enforcement is fighting a different type of war. We are fighting an unrelenting, never-ending fight against criminal predators in our society. While there are battles won and lost each day, there is never a final resolution — a final victory is never in sight.

It takes a very special kind of courage to wage this kind of fight — a special kind of commitment; a special kind of self-sacrifice.

So it is an honor for me to have been invited here, to be among you, and to have the opportunity, as Attorney General, to support you and salute you.

The horrors of El Paso and Dayton last week still weigh heavily on all of us. We still mourn the victims of these evil acts. We are also proud of the police who responded to the scenes and prevented further bloodshed.

It is particularly stirring to watch the footage from Dayton. As the shooting started and civilians fled, you can see the police charging headlong towards the shooter, whom they quickly and skillfully neutralized. Every American should thank God that we still have men and women like them — like you — who stand ready to run toward the mortal danger.

Let me assure you that the President will not let acts of mass shootings and domestic terrorism go unanswered. He has been consulting widely and has directed me and Director Wray to work with our state and local partners, as well as the private sector, to develop strategies and measures to address these threats,

including developing tools that can assist us in detecting potential mass shooters before they strike. I anticipate that we will be sharing range of proposals – legislative as well as operational – in the near future. I can assure you that our proposals will involve collaboration, with you – our colleagues at the state and local levels.

The recent atrocities also remind us of a basic truth. Human beings are capable of great good, but also of the basest evil. Even in a healthy society, violence, lawlessness, and predation lie just below the surface. In the final analysis, what stands between chaos and carnage on the one hand, and the civilized and tranquil society we all yearn for, is the thin blue line of law enforcement. You are the ones manning the ramparts – day in, and day out.

Even in the best of times, there is no tougher calling than serving as a police officer. Today, it is much tougher than it has ever been.

The Framers believed that a free society can only exist if the people have the personal virtue and self-restraint to control their own worst passions and appetites.

If people lose the values and moral discipline to control themselves, then government would increasingly have to use external force to keep order, and the community would gradually lose its freedom. This is what James Madison was talking about when he said, “We have staked our future on the ability of each of us to govern ourselves.”

We live in an age now when the institutions we have relied on to inculcate values and self-restraint have been under constant assault for over 50 years. As a result, we see about us increased social pathology: boys growing up without fathers; alienated and angry young men; gangs engaged in the most brutal violence; mass shootings; increasing mental illness and suicide among young people; a drug epidemic inflicting casualties beyond what we would sustain in a major war; growing domestic violence; an increase in sexual assaults and child exploitation.

You name it. And who is expected to deal with this? As other institutions fail and abdicate, who is expected to stand their ground? Who is expected to pick up the pieces? You are. The police. The thin blue line.

That is why I say that the job you are asked to do has never been more challenging. The risks you are called on to take have never been greater.

Despite the fact that the majority of the American people do support the police, unfortunately, over the past few years, there has been an increasingly vocal minority that regularly attacks the police and advances a narrative that it is the police that are the bad guys rather than the criminals. Whenever there is a confrontation involving the use of force by police, they automatically start screaming for the officers’ scalps, regardless of the facts.

I am not suggesting there are never abuses. As with all human institutions there are sometimes bad apples; and we will deal with that. But these are very much the

exceptions, not the rule. If anything, I continue to be amazed at the professionalism of our police officers in the most extreme circumstances.

The anti-police narrative is fanning disrespect for the law. In recent years, we have witnessed increasing toleration of the notion that it is somehow okay to resist the police.

Previously, it was well understood that, regardless of the circumstances, physical resistance is unacceptable because it necessarily leads to a spiral of escalating violence that endangers the safety of the officer, the suspect, and all in the vicinity. For that reason, virtually all jurisdictions have made resistance a serious crime.

Not too long ago influential public voices — whether in the media or among community and civic leaders — stressed the need to comply with police commands, even if one thinks they are unjust. “Comply first” and, if you think you have been wronged, “complain later.”

But we don’t hear this much anymore. Instead, when an incident escalates due to a suspect’s violent resistance to police, that fact is usually ignored by the commentary. The officer’s every action is dissected, but the suspect’s resistance, and the danger it posed, frequently goes without mention.

We need to get back to basics. We need public voices, in the media and elsewhere, to underscore the need to “Comply first, and, if warranted, complain later.” This will make everyone safe — the police, suspects, and the community at large. And those who resist must be prosecuted for that crime. We must have zero tolerance for resisting police. This will save lives.

We are seeing disrespect for law enforcement in other ways. We were all nauseated by the spectacle of prancing punks pelting New York police officers with water and plastic buckets. Unfortunately, these were not isolated events. From 2014 through 2017, there has been a 20 percent increase in assaults against police, up to about 60,000 per year.

This Administration will not tolerate violence against police, and we will do all we can to protect the safety of law enforcement officers. I will share with you one proposal that we will be advancing after Labor Day. We will be proposing legislation providing that in cases of mass murder, or in cases of murder of a law enforcement officer, there will be a timetable for judicial proceedings that will allow imposition of any death sentence without undue delay. Punishment must be swift and certain.

There is another development that is demoralizing to law enforcement and dangerous to public safety. That is the emergence in some of our large cities of District Attorneys that style themselves as “social justice” reformers, who spend their time undercutting the police, letting criminals off the hook, and refusing to enforce the law.

These anti-law enforcement DAs have tended to emerge in jurisdictions where the

election is largely determined by the primary. Frequently, these candidates ambush an incumbent DA in the primary with misleading campaigns and large infusions of money from outside groups.

Once in office, they have been announcing their refusal to enforce broad swathes of the criminal law. Most disturbing is that some are refusing to prosecute cases of resisting police. Some are refusing to prosecute various theft cases or drug cases, even where the suspect is involved in distribution. And when they do deign to charge a criminal suspect, they are frequently seeking sentences that are pathetically lenient. So these cities are headed back to the days of revolving door justice. The results will be predictable. More crime; more victims.

One of my messages today is that the American people need to pay close attention to issues of public safety in their communities. As a society we should not take our police officers for granted.

I would like to see the American people gain a renewed appreciation of the noble work done by our police officers in protecting our communities. I would like to see increased recognition that being a police officer is the toughest job in the country, and it is getting tougher. I would like to see a greater commitment to supporting the police.

The “thin blue line” is getting thinner. The number of sworn officers per capita has been dropping. We are now in a full employment economy. With lucrative and safer jobs now available in other sectors, police departments must compete hard to attract the best candidates.

Many cities are already unable to fill their ranks, and vacancy rates are mounting. The harder we make the police officer’s job – the less they are supported – the harder it will be to attract qualified candidates. And I think we can anticipate that those who come forward to serve will be increasingly attracted to jurisdictions where the community supports the police.

It is imperative that state and local jurisdictions not scrimp on investing in law enforcement. At time when governments are trying to be all things to all people, it is important not to forget the basics. The very reason we have government is to protect the public safety. The very first duty of government is to provide the police. If we are to maintain the professional police forces we currently have, we must ensure ample budgets to fund good compensation, full force levels, sufficient equipment and adequate training.

I would like to turn for a moment to my priorities and the importance of our partnership.

Two of my highest priorities are continuing the fight against violent crime and combating the opioid epidemic and the scourge of other dangerous drugs, like resurging methamphetamine.

When I last served as Attorney General in the early 90’s, violent crime was at all-time high levels in the country. Starting in the 1960’s, we had gone through three

decades of “reform” that turned our criminal justice system into a laughable revolving door. Incarceration rates dropped precipitously; and crime rates tripled, reaching a high in 1991-92.

Starting with the Reagan Administration, and running through the Bush, Clinton, and Bush years, we strengthened our criminal justice systems at both the Federal and state level. We focused on getting chronic violent offenders off the streets and into prisons to serve meaningful sentences that protected the community. We worked closely with our State and local partners on programs like Weed & Seed and Triggerlock.

The result? A steady and sharp drop in violent crime starting in 1992. Today, violent crime has been cut in half.

Unfortunately, in the last few years of the Obama Administration, the violent crime rate started rising again. Days after his inauguration, President Trump issued an Executive Order with two clear directives. First, he declared that this Administration would reduce crime in America. Second, he directed the Department of Justice to take the lead on Federal actions to support law enforcement efforts nationwide and to collaborate with State, tribal, and local jurisdictions to restore public safety to all of our communities.

We take this responsibility seriously and, working closely with our State and local partners, we have succeeded once again in driving crime rates back down. I am proud of our work together on Project Safe Neighborhood, and a variety of joint anti-gang and anti-gun crime efforts.

We have made a difference, but we cannot rest on our laurels. Crime levels are still too high and we must keep up a full court press. In the weeks ahead, we will be doubling down on our attack on violent crime. We will be expanding our efforts against gun violence and violent gangs. Once again, we plan on doing this shoulder-to-shoulder with our State and local partners.

On the drug front, we are facing a monumental challenge. To be frank, the Obama Administration showed little interest in prosecuting the fight against dangerous drugs. A tsunami built up and has been crashing over the country, bringing death and destruction.

The death toll from opioids alone is higher than we would sustain in a major war. Indeed, in a single year, we lose more people to opioids than we lost during the entire Vietnam War.

Fortunately, this Administration has thrown down the gauntlet. It declared a national emergency, marshalled the Nation’s resources, and is fighting back.

We have a robust program to attack the problem of over-prescription and diversion of legal opioids, and we are definitely having an impact. Prescription rates are markedly down. I am confident these successes will accelerate.

I think our attack on illicit opioids is building momentum. It is going to be a long

difficult road, but we are gaining real traction.

As you know, this Administration has sharply increased drug trafficking prosecutions, especially as to opioids. In 2018 we prosecuted 36 percent more opioid-related offenses than we did in the previous year. Fentanyl prosecutions were up 200 percent.

Fentanyl and other synthetics are especially deadly. Unless we make progress on fentanyl, the gains we are making elsewhere can be overwhelmed. A year ago, the Department launched Operation SOS, targeting synthetics in 10 high-impact districts. The first year's results are promising, and I plan to ratchet up this initiative.

Obviously, the head of the snake is outside the United States. Most of the illegal drugs coming into the country – opioids, cocaine, and meth – are trafficked from Mexico by transnational organized crime, particularly the Mexican cartels.

We must destroy these cartels. This is a uniquely Federal responsibility. We have destroyed cartels in the past, but we let up so that other groups were able to take their place. We cannot do that again. I don't underestimate how hard this work is, and how long it will take.

The successful prosecution of El Chapo was a big step forward. We have to capitalize on that. I have asked our agencies to use every tool at our Nation's disposal to step up the attack on the cartels. I am hoping that President Trump's breakthrough agreement with Mexico on cooperating on the immigration crisis will give us an opportunity to work more closely in attacking the cartels.

In closing, I want to thank you again for all that you do. Thank you for keeping us safe where we live and work. Ever since the settlers in Boston established the night watch in 1635, America has had a proud tradition of professionals who stand guard against those who would do us harm. You are the latest in that noble line.

Please continue to do what you do. This Administration has your back. May God bless you and keep you safe. And may God bless the United States of America.

#

AG

19-856

Do not reply to this message. If you have questions, please use the contacts in the message or call the Office of Public Affairs at 202-514-2007.